

# Whistle Stop

Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum

P. O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN. 37605-0432

(423) 753-5797

[www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org](http://www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org)



**Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage**

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With Winter 2024-25 about to become a memory, here's one last visit courtesy Aaron Bryant, who posted on our web site and returns to Whistle Stop, with this shot of a westbound stack train crossing the East River at Ingleside, WV. Motive power is AC44C6M rebuild NS #4635.

## *March 24<sup>th</sup> General Membership Meeting*

The Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum will have our regular Membership Meeting at 6:30 pm on Monday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025 at the Chuckey Depot, 110 Spring St., Jonesborough, TN. Our program this month is entitled "Train Wrecks of 2024". Come out, bring a friend, and enjoy a great night of railroading with your fellow railfans. It's always great to have guests at our meetings.

## *Member Notes*

Please keep the following members in your thoughts and prayers for various reasons: Fred Phofl, Jim Calhoun, Tony King, Gary Price, Jack Maloney, Ed Fuller and Lois Tilley. If anyone knows of a member that needs a card, thoughts for various concerns, or to request that one of our members or family be reported for various concerns in the *Whistle Stop*, email a request to [wataugavalley@gmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@gmail.com) or [wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com).

There were no new members this month.

**ADDRESS CHANGES:** If anyone's address, phone number or email address has changed, please contact Les Billings at [wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com) for correction. This will make it better so no one misses mailings, phone calls or emails. Thank You.

### **WATAUGA VALLEY DUES NOTICES—PLEASE ACT IF YOU HAVE NOT PAID**

Late dues notices were recently sent out to all members that have not renewed for 2025. Please act fast and get your dues mailed back to WVRHS&M, P O Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605-0432. NON-RENEWALS WILL BE DROPPED FROM THE MEMBERSHIP LIST AND THIS WILL BE YOUR LAST WHISTLE STOP. Per by-laws, members who have not joined by March 31 will be removed from the membership roster.

### **NEW EXCURSION MAILING LIST**

WVRHS&M has put together a new mass email list for people to receive advance notification of future excursions. Anyone interested in getting on this advance list should e-mail your contact information to [wataugavalley@gmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@gmail.com).

### **DATES TO REMEMBER**

March 24	6:30pm	General Membership Meeting, Chuckey Depot, Jonesborough
April 8	6:30pm	Board of Directors meeting, Chuckey Depot, Jonesborough
April 28	6:30pm	General Membership Meeting, Chuckey Depot, Jonesborough
May 3		Great Smoky Mountains RR Excursion
May 13	6:30pm	Board of Directors Meeting, Chuckey Depot, Jonesborough
May 19	6:30pm	General membership Meeting, Chuckey Depot, Jonesborough

Please note that the May meeting will be moved up one week on account of Memorial Day.

### **SPRING TRAIN EXCURSION**

We are happy to announce that our May 3, 2025 Spring Excursion has about sold out. We have a very large crowd riding with us.

### **DINNER ON THE DINER**



The proposed dates for our 2025 "*Dinner on the Diner*" is June 13-14, 2025. We expect a large number of diners joining us for a fine meal on the *Moultrie*. More information to follow soon.

## *Mechanical Report*

Two of the Watauga Valley passenger cars will be back to the yard soon and a lot of work is needed on the cars as several of them have been on the road over 6 months. The bad weather has again taken its toll on the Watauga Valley Mechanical Team in working at the yard the last several weeks. Hopefully the weather will turn around and we can get some of the work done that was planned for the spring. If you would like to volunteer at the Jonesborough Spring St. Coach Yard, please call the WVRHS&M office at 423-753-5797 or email [wataugavalley@gmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@gmail.com) and leave a message; the mechanical team will call you back. We are in need of several more volunteers to help on the WVRHS&M cars.

**Moultrie diner (WATX 400):** on the way back to the Spring St. Coach Yard.

**St. Augustine coach (WATX 500):** on the way back to the Spring St. Coach Yard.

**Crescent Harbor sleeper/lounge (WATX 2351):** at the Spring St. Coach Yard.

**Powhatan Arrow coach (WATX 539), CLINCHFIELD 100:** at the NC Transportation Museum in Spencer, NC.

## *Chuckey Depot / Museum*

The Chuckey Railroad Depot and Museum is coming alive in the Spring. The last several weeks attendance has been very good especially on the weekends with over 50+ coming in to see the beautiful depot. If you have not been at the depot, come on down and see the new exhibit, "Different Freight Cars", on display. The Depot is open Thursday-Friday 1pm to 5pm; Saturday 11am to 5pm; and Sunday 1pm to 5pm. Closed Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.



Our good friend and WVRHS&M member **Sandhi Kozsuch** is doing research on the 3C Railroad, which was proposed to come right through Johnson City. This is part of his work investigating the Clinchfield Railroad and its predecessors and successors. He has developed a website presenting that work which can be found at [www.clinchfield.org](http://www.clinchfield.org).



Another website he has created is [www.appalachian-railroads.org](http://www.appalachian-railroads.org), which, besides the 3Cs, also addresses the ET&WNC and the major railroads crossing the Appalachians such as B&O, C&O, N&W, L&N, etc. and their predecessors and successors.



As if that isn't a plate full, Sandhi also authors [www.southern-railroads.org](http://www.southern-railroads.org) which features the Southern Railway and its predecessors and successors.



The three websites now reach well over 50,000 visitors/readers each month.



## *In the News*



### *Demolition of Canton (NC) Paper Mill has Begun*

[ED. NOTE: While the redevelopment of the Canton paper mill site is great news for the community, how this affects the future of the Blue Ridge Southern Railroad, whose principle customer was the mill, remains to be seen.]

[Article by Sarah Honosky, *Asheville Citizen Times*, via *yahoo!news*] Demolition of the Canton paper mill site has started in the months immediately after the sale of the iconic mill.



Mayor Zeb Smathers told the *Citizen Times* that, based on conversations with the new owner, in about two years a majority of the buildings will be gone. He is hopeful that some of the structures will remain, "carrying on the legacy" of generations of mill workers.

"That's pretty breathtaking," he said March 14. "When I drive by that mill site taking my son to school, I make notice of that. I want to put somewhere in his memory what was. Obviously, we're talking a lot about what is next, but no matter what is next, it's so important we don't forget what made, not just Canton and Haywood County, but the entire region special."

The mill and surrounding properties were acquired by Spirtas Worldwide, a St. Louis-based demolition and environmental remediation company, in January for a \$3.36 million sale price, according to property records.

President Eric Spirtas said his company, along with Greensboro-based D.H. Griffin Co., began demolition work in the last several weeks, with a focus on industry- and age-obsolete buildings. Much of the core campus suffered flood damage from Tropical Storm Helene.

For more than a century, the mill served as the economic and civic center of Canton. The property sprawls over a 185-acre campus, straddling the Pigeon River.

Primarily all the paper-making buildings on the east side of the river will be removed, he said, though he shares a hope with Smathers that some structures will be able to remain. He confirmed the demolition process would take about two years.

"We have to work with proper authorities, proper agencies to see to it that the ground, the area, the development is flood free so that people can insure and build, and we can bring commerce to Canton," Spirtas said.

The mill was established in 1908 by the Champion Fibre Co. and served as a crucial regional employer until it closed in May 2023. In the time it operated, the mill changed hands several times, eventually being purchased by Evergreen Packaging, which merged into Pactiv Evergreen in 2020. It was announced in December that Pactiv Evergreen would be sold to the Charlotte-based Novolex in a transaction worth \$6.7 billion.

[Continued on next page.]

When the mill rang its last bell, 1,200 regional workers were laid off, marking the start of what some WNC leaders called an economic "regional crisis."

Spirtas Worldwide performs industrial demolition, environmental remediation, redevelopment and other services around the world, according to its website. Projects include the Choren Biomass Gasification Refinery in Freiberg, Germany, and the Wausau paper mill in Brokaw, Wisconsin.

In the announcement of the sale, Spirtas said the property would be turned into a mixed industrial, commercial and residential site. The company said it was committed to collaborating with local, regional and national experts to develop a master plan for the mill's future.

Smathers said there is much planning and design left to be done. He hopes the revitalization of the property will result in a new "economic furnace" for the region at a time, post-Tropical Storm Helene, when it most needs it.



## *WMSRR 1309 Nears Reassembly*

[By Chase Gunnoe, [trains.com](https://trains.com)] Chesapeake & Ohio 2-6-6-2 No. 1309 is poised for reassembly after spending the 2024 season sidelined for planned maintenance work, Western Maryland Scenic Railroad officials say. The Mallet has undergone a laundry list of in-house projects and sub-contracted work aimed at positioning the locomotive for long-term operation.



The tourist railroad tapped D&G Machine Products of Maine to manage the locomotive's piston work, while in-house at the railroad's Ridgeley, W.Va., shops, officials are adjusting the locomotive's running gear, boring the cylinders, and installing a new brick arch in the firebox.

"We are on the home stretch with the cylinder project," says shop foreman Dan Ferden. "The cylinders are bored out. We are just waiting for the last few parts and pieces to come back from Maine, and the new piston rings to arrive from New York. We have changed out several stay bolts in the boiler this year as well and we did an entirely new brick arch in the firebox,"

Ferden says they've taken apart the crosshead guides on the rear locomotive, performed re-shimming and re-tramming work, and now they are moving toward a pre-assembly phase.

"There's been a tremendous amount of problem-solving and custom one-off, two-off parts, pieces and tools that have had to be made to get [No. 1309] to the point where it is now," says Ferden.

No. 1309's maintenance work has been on the railroad's periphery since it first entered revenue service in December 2021. Officials knew that the 2-6-6-2 would require further restorative efforts to sustain long-term reliable operation beyond the 2022-2023 seasons, but the timing was moved forward based on operations in December 2023. Work on the 2-6-6-2, which accompanied other maintenance projects involving the railroad's growing diesel locomotive and passenger fleet, has made notable progress since last summer.

Ferden says once the locomotive is put back together, the railroad will perform easy break-in test runs, possibly as soon as this spring, but a firm date on when the locomotive will return to service was not disclosed.

## *Helene Disaster Recovery*

### **CSX in Nolichucky Gorge**

It could be September 2025 before CSX Transportation is able to resume operations on the badly damaged portions of its former Clinchfield Railroad route in Tennessee and North Carolina. The railroad has listed that September as the date by which emergency repairs will be completed in its latest permit request for repairs on the route devastated by Hurricane Helene in late September 2024.

### **Old Railcars Find New Life as Bridges**

[By Stuart Chirls, FREIGHTWAVES] Obsolete railcars are getting a reprieve from the scrapper's torch to serve as vital road links in an area of North Carolina ravaged by Hurricane Helene.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation and Innovative Bridge Co. are installing retired railroad flatcars as a quick fix to temporarily replace road bridges damaged or destroyed by the storm this past September.



Petal, Mississippi-based IBC has so far installed more than 40 railcar bridges in seven counties.

The company typically installs 180-200 such bridges each year, handling jobs from Texas to Pennsylvania. This was its first disaster response job. The railcar bridges, paved and with railings installed, are one-third the cost of a typical temporary bridge.

NCDOT expects to have all bridge reconstruction projects under contract by the end of March and all spans rebuilt within two years.

### **USFS Receives \$660M to Rebuild Creeper Trail**

[Condensed from Liam Bridgeman, WCYB TV] The Virginia Creeper Trail, which brings tourists from around the world and business to Damascus, [VA] is receiving funding to rebuild from the federal government.

Since Helene, 17 of the 34-miles of the trail have been devastated but through the American Relief Act of 2025 the federal government has set aside \$660 million dollars to rebuild the trail.

Virginia U.S. Senator Mark Warner was a big proponent of getting relief funding for the trail and for Damascus, but he says something needs to be done in the meantime. "Even if you start construction this spring, it's going to take some time. So, what do we do in the interim to make sure this community stays vibrant," Warner said.



Since the announcement, the U.S. Forest Service, which controls the trail, says they're seeking public input on the reconstruction.

[**ED. NOTE:** The Creeper Trail is open from Abingdon to Damascus, VA.]



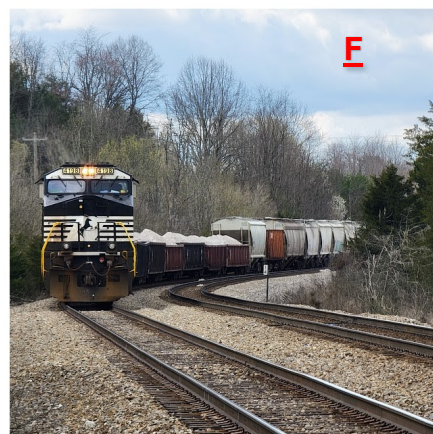
# *Display in the Block*

*by Les Billings*

## Happy Spring!

This month I wanted to make this section to be more of a Gallery with less words and more photos. I am more of a photographer than a writer. This format is better for me and does not take as much time.

**A:** Loaded CSX southbound Coal drag just north of Johnson City. **B:** Eastbound NS empty Trash train in Johnson City. **C:** CSX Freight headed north towards Kingsport from J.C. **D:** NS 289 westbound closing in on the Chuckey Depot. **E:** CSX northbound at the south end of Johnson City. **F:** NS 126 eastbound with its load of Zinc holding at Curtis in Piney Flats.



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[whistlestop.editor@gmail.com](mailto:whistlestop.editor@gmail.com)

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